

Northern Expedition

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(Redirected from Northern Expedition (1926–1927))

The **Northern Expedition** (Chinese: 北伐; pinyin: běi fā) was a military campaign led by the Kuomintang (KMT) from 1926 to 1928. Its main objective was to unify China under the Kuomintang banner by ending the rule of local warlords. It led to the demise of the Beiyang government and the Chinese reunification of 1928.

Contents

- 1 Preparation
- 2 First Expedition
- 3 The Purge
- 4 Warlord Counteroffensive
- 5 Nationalist Rapprochement
- 6 The Battle of Longtan
- 7 Second Expedition
- 8 Outcome
- 9 See also
- 10 External links

Preparation

The Northern Expedition began from the KMT's power base in Guangdong province. In 1925 the May 30th Movement announced plans for strike and protest against western imperialism and its warlord agents in China. At the same time, the alliance between KMT and Chinese Communist Party was questioned after the Zhongshan Warship Incident in March 1926, and the following events made Chiang Kai-shek the paramount military leader of KMT in effect. Although Chiang doubted Sun Yat-sen's policy of alliance with the Soviet Union and CCP, he still needed aid from the Soviet Union, so he could not break up the alliance at that time. Above all, Chiang needed a stage to indicate his role of paramount leader and military talent. On the other hand, the Soviet Union and CCP cherished the alliance more than Chiang, as they did need a stage to show their friendship to the KMT.

Northern Expedition



The National Revolutionary Army soldiers marched into the British concessions in Hankou during the Northern Expedition.

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Date | 1926 - 1928 |
| Location | Northern China |
| Result | Kuomintang victory: Nominal unification of China |

Belligerents

| | |
|---|--|
|  Kuomintang government |  Beiyang government |
| |  Fengtian clique |
| |  Zhili clique |

Commanders

| | |
|---|---|
|  Chiang Kai-shek |  Wu Peifu |
| |  Sun Chuanfang |
| |  Zhang Zuolin |

Strength

| | |
|----------------|---------|
| 250,000 troops | Unknown |
|----------------|---------|



Thus all three parties agreed to launch the Northern Expedition to solve their own problems.

The main targets of this expedition consisted of three notorious and powerful warlords of China: Zhang Zuolin who governed Manchuria, Wu Peifu in the Central Plain of China and Sun Chuanfang in eastern coast of China. Advised by the famous Russian general Vasily Blyukher using the pseudonym Galen, the HQ of the expedition decided to use all its power to defeat these warlords one by one: first Wu, then Sun, and finally Zhang.

First Expedition

On July 9, 1926, Chiang gave his lecture to 100,000 soldiers of the National Revolutionary Army, which was set up by the students trained in the Whampoa Military Academy and equipped with Russian arsenal in the opening ceremony, which was the official commencement of Northern Expedition. NRA soldiers were far better organized than the warlord armies which they faced, for they had good military advisors, better weapons and commissars from CPC to inspire the soldiers. In addition, the NRA was regarded as a progressive force on behalf of ordinary people persecuted by warlords, for which it received warm welcome and strong support from peasants and workers. It was no surprise the NRA could march from Zhu River area to Yangtze River in less than half a year and annihilate the main force of Wu and Sun, and strengthen its force from 100,000 to 250,000.



Chiang Kai-shek, Commander-in-Chief of the National Revolutionary Army, emerged from the Northern Expedition as the leader of China.

The Purge

With the defeat of the Zhili clique, Chiang thought it was the opportune moment to dispense of his Communist allies. In the Shanghai massacre of April 12, thousands of Communists were executed. This also caused a split between the KMT's left and right wings. The leftists, led by Wang Jingwei, ruled from Wuhan. They maintained the alliance with the CCP and condemned Chiang's purge. As a result, the party and its military forces were disorganized during the late summer of 1927.

Warlord Counteroffensive

For the warlords, it was unprecedented opportunity to rebuild their armies and counter the now weakened Kuomintang. Sun Chuanfang, the most active of these, began to marshal his military forces with his ally Xu Kun, one of China's best generals. At the same time, Sun was communicating with Zhang Zuolin of Manchuria, requesting assistance of any kind in the hopes of regaining his lost territory, including Nanking. He brought up an army of one hundred thousand men and arranged them around the Lower Yangtze River. His plan was to begin an all-out attack upon the Nationalist forces of Chiang, Li Zongren and Bai Chongxi, drive them away from the Yangtze and Nanking and pursue them southward back into Guangzhou, where the expedition had started.

Opposing the rejuvenated warlord armies were three Kuomintang Armies, referred to as the "Route Armies". The First Route Army, north of Nanking in Jiangsu Province; the Second Route, to the west of the First and centered around the city of Xuzhou, and the Third on the west of Xuzhou closer to Wuhan in the South, protecting against any intervention by the Leftist Wuhan forces. The Nationalists could afford to muster the same amount of manpower but was very divided by political tensions and leadership conflicts. Yet, it was the element of surprise that gave Sun and Xu Kun the advantage for their attack was not fully expected by Chiang or his military

commanders. Finally, the Nationalists had stationed many of their troops on the northern side of the Yangtze in order to hold Xuzhou that had left them exposed to the warlord armies and their impending counteroffensive. Chiang had thus sent a large number of troops into positions in which they could neither defend properly, without the combined support of the army, nor defend with any real purpose, setting the stage for the last great struggle of the Warlord Era.

Sun Chuanfang, on July 24, ordered the counterattack to begin. His army, including Xu Kun's forces, tore through the surprised Nationalist forces, resulting in the loss of Xuzhou in northern Jiangsu province. The Second Route Army, stationed in the area, was forced to withdraw south, using the Long-Hai railway as an escape route. The other Route Armies also began to retreat south toward the Yangtze as the warlord armies routed any remaining troops in their path. Chiang, who was astounded to hear that Xuzhou had fallen, sacked the army's commander, Wang Tianpei, and ordered that Xuzhou be retaken. Against the advice of Li Zongren, who thought it was better to withdraw south, Chiang, having exclaimed, "I will not return to Nanking until Xuzhou is back in our possession". He launched his attack with the Second Route Army in August, resulting in a terrible defeat for the Nationalists. This defeat led to Chiang's immediate resignation on Aug. 6th as head of the Nanking Government, prompting him to move to Shanghai, where his loyal supporters followed. Following this, Li Zongren and other military leaders evacuated the whole army to the Yangtze with the principle goal of defending Nanking.

Nationalist Rapprochement

Li Zongren, if only in name, the de facto leader of the Nanking Government, set out to negotiate the possible reconciliation between the Wuhan and Nanking Governments. The talks, however, were interrupted on Aug. 24th when Sun's troops, supported by Wuhan dissenters, attacked the Yangtze warship that Li was staying on. Yet, the talks had succeeded in getting Wuhan to cooperate with the Nanking Government. Wang Jingwei, upon the end of negotiations, order the purging of all Communists with Wuhan. This resulted in a military coup by Communist troops in Nanchang of Jiangxi Province, leaving eight thousand Nationalists dead while many others fled. As a result, chaos broke out in Wuhan, contributing to it destabilization and the strengthening of the Nanking Government.

The Battle of Longtan

On Aug. 25th, Sun Chuanfang's army, now close to the Yangtze, launched an all-out attack upon the Nationalist Forces. The worst hit was the First Route Army, defending the strategically placed city of Longtan, vital to the supply of Nanking via Shanghai. The battle raged around Longtan, especially on Mt. Wulongshan, where Nationalist troops stubbornly held out far longer than any expected, assuring that Sun could not continue his advance to Nanking. Bai Chongxi, recognizing the importance of Longtan, ordered reinforcements to be brought up as quickly as possible. Units of the Seventh and Nineteenth Corps arrived on the scene on the 28th and pushed Sun's battered army back to Longtan, relieving Mt. Wulongshan's defenders and buying time for further troops to arrive. On August 30, the full might of the Second Route Army attacked Longtan and, by late afternoon, recaptured the city. Sun's army, with losses equal to two-thirds of their original strength, fled across the Yangtze in defeat.

Second Expedition

The period between September and November were calm periods of time in which the Nationalists, once more led by the reinstated Chiang Kai-shek, reorganized themselves, though it was not until Jan. 2 that it was formally announced. The Wuhan government, finally bowing to pressure, reconciled itself with Chiang and formally merged with the Nanking Government. On Dec. 12, the Nationalist forces, after reoccupying most of the territory lost that summer, recaptured Xuzhou. In response, Zhang Zuolin ordered that all loyal troops join his Anguo-jun Army,

which had formed in response to the losses incurred by Sun Chuanfang's counteroffensive. Yet, it was not until April 2, following the conclusion of the Fourth Meeting of the Congress of the Kuomintang that Chiang ordered the beginning of the Second Expedition.

The Nationalists swept across the remains of Sun Chuanfang's and Xu Kun's Zhili Clique forces and reached the Yellow River in mid-April, 1928. When Yan Xishan declared his intention to take Beijing, Zhang decided it was best to evacuate. On June 4, Zhang, who was heading north from Beijing by train, was assassinated by Japanese conspirators, operating from Japan's Kwantung Army. Yan's forces occupied Beijing and the city was renamed "Beiping" or "Northern Peace". Zhang's son, Zhang Xueliang, began to work with Chiang and the Kuomintang in the hopes of resisting Japanese aims in the area, these fears being confirmed three years later.

Outcome

Nowadays, the Northern Expedition is viewed positively in China because it ended a period of disorder and started the formation of an effective central government. However it did not fully solve the warlord problem, as many warlords still had large armies that served their needs, not those of China.

The only faction destroyed during the expedition was the Zhili clique. Local provincial warlords who seized or enhanced their power included Li Zongren of the New Guangxi Clique, Yan Xishan of the Shanxi clique, Feng Yuxiang and his Northwestern or Guominjun Clique, Tang Shengzhi in Hunan, Chiang Kuang-Nai in Fujian, Sheng Shicai of Xinjiang, Long Yun of Yunnan, Wang Jialie of Guizhou, Liu Xiang and Liu Wenhui of the Sichuan Clique, Han Fuqu of Shandong, Bie Tingfang (别廷芳) of Henan, the Ma Clique of Ma Bufang and his family in Qinghai, Ma Hongkui in Ningxia, and Ma Zhongyin in Gansu, Chen Jitang and his Cantonese Clique, Lu Diping (鲁涤平) of Jiangxi and Jing Yuexiu (井岳秀) of Shaanxi.

This is because of their alliance with the Kuomintang. They acted as franchisees of the party, wore NRA uniforms, and espoused the party doctrine. With the exception of the Xinjiang and Fengtian cliques, the warlords that survived 1928 tended to have some background in revolutionary circles, some going back to the Tongmenghui era.

The wars between these new warlords claimed more lives than ever in the 1930's. This would prove to be a major problem for the KMT all the way through World War II and the following civil war.

Chiang did get the greatest benefit from the expedition, however, for the victory achieved his personal goal of becoming paramount leader. Furthermore, Chiang made the military command superior to KMT party leadership, which resulted in his dictatorship later.

It is worth noting that the Northern Expedition was one of only two times in Chinese history when China was united by a conquest from south to north. The other time was when the Ming Dynasty succeeded in expelling the Mongol-Yuan Dynasty from China.

See also

- National Revolutionary Army
- Whampoa Military Academy
- Chiang Kai-shek
- Military of the Republic of China
- History of the Republic of China
- Sino-German cooperation

中文

This article contains Chinese text.

Without proper rendering support, you may see question marks, boxes, or other symbols instead of Chinese characters.

- Central Plains War
- Kuomintang
- Jinan Incident

External links

- Map of the route of the Northern Expedition
(<http://www.gzwh.gov.cn/whw/channel/ztlm/zgsd/3d/photo/2006628154961.jpg>) in Chinese
- ROC Ministry of National Defense Official Website (<http://www.mnd.gov.tw/English/>)
- The Armed Forces Museum of ROC (<http://museum.mnd.gov.tw/English/index.aspx>)

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Categories: 1926 in China | 1927 in China | Warlordism in Republican China | National Revolutionary Army | Military campaigns involving China

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